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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BK](#) [HR](#) [REGIONAL](#) [ISSUES](#)
SUBJECT: CROATS WELCOME DIALOGUE WITH US ON BOSNIAN ISSUES

Classified By: Political Officer Tom Selinger for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)
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¶1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: During an October 9-10 visit to Zagreb, US Ambassador to BiH McElhaney updated top officials on USG views regarding BiH's future. He also called on Croatian political leaders to help encourage Bosnian Croats to support future constitutional reform efforts. The GoC, the Office of the President, and various political parties all reacted positively and agreed that BiH was not sustainable under its current structure.

¶2. (C) After years of our warnings to stay out of BiH politics due to the expansionist views of the wartime government, a USG proposal for engagement may have initially given Croatian politicians pause. However, during the Ambassador's visit, all appeared to understand the constructive role they could now play in making BiH a viable neighbor and sustainable home to Bosnian Croats. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

GoC GOAL: HELP BOSNIAN CROATS SEE FUTURE WITHIN BiH

¶3. (C) MFA State Secretary Hidajet Biscevic noted the GoC's concern over the future of BiH and welcomed Ambassador McElhaney's call for a closer dialogue with the USG on Zagreb's role there. According to Biscevic, if Bosnian Croats see no future in BiH they will come to Croatia, straining Croatia's capacity to absorb migrants and throwing the already delicate ethnic dynamics in BiH out of balance.

¶4. (C) Biscevic said the GoC supports constitutional reform in BiH and sees no need for a third entity. He outlined five key elements of the policy of PM Ivo Sanader and his government toward BiH:

- Supporting the territorial integrity of BiH,
- Finding a new internal architecture for BiH through constitutional arrangements that is both democratic and protects all constituent peoples,
- Firmly supporting a continued role in BiH for the international community (the Office of the High Representative should not go away too soon),
- Engaging the Catholic Church as unifying force among Bosnian Croats (PM Sanader sees this as even more important now that political parties are split), and
- Moving BiH's efforts to enter a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU forward (Sanader intends to raise this issue in Washington when he visits the week of October 16).

PRESIDENT'S ADVISOR: KOMSIC ELECTION MAY PROVE POSITIVE

¶5. (C) Budimir Loncar, President Stjepan Mesic's special advisor on international relations, said that while the

election of Social Democrat Zeljko Komsic as the Croatian member of the BiH tripartite presidency has been controversial among Bosnian Croats, it may ultimately be positive that he was not the candidate of any single Croat faction. Loncar called Komsic a courageous man of principle and said President Mesic knows him well. Even PM Sanader, who supported HDZ 1990 leader Bozo Ljubic, has reacted relatively positively to Komsic's election, according to Loncar. At Ambassador McElhaney's suggestion, Loncar agreed to advise President Mesic to invite Komsic to Zagreb for a state visit.

¶6. (C) Loncar suggested that Republika Srpska PM Milorad Dodik be encouraged to be more active federally -- even to become BiH PM. The international community should ignore his rhetoric about RS independence, according to Loncar, and try to involve him in common projects that will lead to EU integration. In an upcoming visit to Belgrade, Mesic will ask Serbian President Boris Tadic to encourage Dodik to be active in Sarajevo.

¶7. (C) Ambassador McElhaney expressed skepticism that Dodik would take the PM job in Sarajevo or even put a strong person there, as the failure of constitutional reforms has left that position with too little power. Loncar replied that it is critical that the new PM is a Serb who supports constitutional amendments. As the Croat community is next in line for the Presidency, Loncar said the Foreign Minister should be a Bosniak, such as Zlatko Dizdarevic, former BiH ambassador in Zagreb.

OPPOSITION PARTIES: NO MORE POLITICAL GAMES WITH BIH CROATS

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¶8. (C) Croatian People's Party (HNS) President Vesna Pusic told Ambassador McElhaney that Bosnian Croats no longer trust political parties, as they have been used as pawns both in BiH and in Croatia. She said parties other than the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) will have to win their trust with policies that protect their interests but also lead to EU integration.

¶9. (C) Social Democratic Party (SDP) foreign policy advisor Zoran Milanovic said his party hesitated before it supported the campaign of its sister party in BiH to elect Komsic, but ultimately got involved and intends to help present him to the Croatian public as a legitimate representative of the Bosnian Croat community. Komsic, who is not yet well known within Croatia, will appear on a popular weekend television talk show in Zagreb on October 15.

¶10. (C) Milanovic noted that Bosnians with Croatian citizenship can vote in Croatian parliamentary elections, expected in November 2007, and traditionally lean heavily in favor of the HDZ. As a result, the SDP must be careful not to become too active in BiH or it risks galvanizing HDZ supporters there.

¶11. (C) Former Croatian Ambassador to the UN Ivan Simonovic stressed that European integration should be the key driver of stability in BiH and is something that Croatian politicians could promote. When the BiH public has a 15-year vision of EU membership, which will result in standards that protect the rights of all people, they will realize that their inter-ethnic disputes are not worth it.

FEARS ABOUT DODIK'S REFERENDUM

¶12. (C) In separate meeting requested by Security and Intelligence Agency (SOA) head Tomislav Karamarko, the intelligence chief expressed pessimism about RS, saying he believes Dodik intends to initiate a referendum for RS independence in the aftermath of Kosovo final status.

Karamarko fears this will be seriously destabilizing. Ambassador McElhaney noted that the USG has sent a strong warning to Dodik not to pursue a referendum. The international community still has considerable pull in BiH, the Ambassador reminded, and will not hesitate to use the Bonn Powers to prevent a referendum.

¶13. (U) Ambassador McElhaney has cleared this cable.
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